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Review of i'm not ghosting you by Jeremy Fernando

Review of *i'm not ghosting you* by Jeremy Fernando (Delere Press, 2025). 122 pp. ISBN 978-981-94-1724-7.

In *i'm not ghosting you*, Jeremy Fernando bemoans the difficulty of putting words down on paper and transcribing the voices and memories of the past. It is as if these voices were "trapped on the tapes" (quoting Ann Rower), only to be released by the writer, or transcriber. Unlike the scribe, who merely copies words as things, the transcriber hears voices. He must tune into them via his antennae. For Jeremy Fernando, as for Jack Spicer, "[l]anguage constitutes the subject, that 'I' which speaks and can recognize experience, through a medium which irrevocably cleaves the individual from the real. This is a vision of language, of subjectivity, as total isolation" (Ron Silliman, *The New Sentence*, 2003, 150) – Spicer alone in his room, after a night of drinking, transcribing "thing language," in the form of transmissions from the Outside, from Mars.

Jeremy Fernando's series of poems, like Jack Spicer's *Language*, is a meditation on the nature of language as discourse, on memory as an inscription of events, and on love and the memory of it. It is a series of poems interspersed with quotations from Continental philosophers and lyrics from American pop music. It is an improvisation as defined by Stephen Fredman: that which has no beginning or point of origin. In fact, Fernando quotes Marguerite Duras before the table of contents of *i'm not ghosting you*: "This book has no beginning or end, and it hasn't got a middle either." According to Fredman, an improvisation is an unpremeditated and unprecedented work that breaks forth extemporaneously in a unique moment and whose beginning is what matters and once the beginning has started there is no looking back (*Poet's Prose: The crisis in American verse*, 1990, 15). Fernando begins with a memory from his childhood in Malaysia and then regrets not being able to "write" the memories again with someone, perhaps the reader, simply addressed as "you". He even doubts the reader is there: "Who am I even telling this to: I suppose, you." Then he says, "Perhaps everything was always written for you." Later he says,

> Most of the time the world is lost in translation. I'd like to believe that we, somehow, managed to find each other in that movement, in that dancing-with, in that most cautious of spaces-between where one can never quite know what is lost nor what is added. So perhaps not so much that we found each other but are constantly finding each other in translation.

The first poem in *i'm not ghosting you* is entitled "shadow light grief," which three conjoined substantives are from a line by Jesus Castro Yanez: "Shadows are not the opposite of light: they are its grief." This apparent absent-present, ostensibly human being, which he also at one point in one of the poems refers to as the rhetorical device of prosopopoeia, has been previously addressed in the second person singular and then conjoined with Fernando himself in the first person plural 'we'. However, there is an air of mystery as to who the addressee is when the

nature of the circumstances of their finding each other while dancing with each other, "in that most cautious of spaces-between," is not disclosed. Furthermore, there is an ambiguity of meaning. Between which spaces did they meet? Perhaps a liminal zone of some sort, "where one can never quite know what is lost nor what is added," or perhaps, a strange mathematical space or geometry of "additive subtraction." Perhaps Fernando is referring not to a human being but the entity of language itself, that is, according to Derrida, the "play[ing] of signifying references" (*Of Grammatology*, 1997, 7).

Fernando confuses the voices he hears with language as "thing," language as conceived by Derrida: language *under* the name of writing (transcription), not *in* the name of writing. According to Derrida, phonetic language, the spoken word, (*la parole*, *le langage*) has become subsumed by writing to such an extent that we can no longer conceive of the *logos*, the spoken word, as having preceded the written word in the evolution of language. As Spicer said, the "Lowghost" has come down off the cross, the *logos* disguised as the "Lowghost." The spoken aspect of language, the "Lowghost," has become the wraith or shadow of the written word. It is as if the *logos* has been demoted. The spoken aspect of language, it's vatic mode, is merely a pun on the written word. We can only understand a pun in the play between the written and its ghost, the spoken.

Sometimes Fernando signals the present absence of spoken language (Spicer's Lowghost) with a dangling 'it', for instance. Its reference is not clear from the context, which exposes an absence, or the presence of death:

> Time heals. Poor Achilles, his death a death that was written into him, a writing that was a non-writing a not being caressed by Styx an absent inscription. Sometimes one is even tempted to call it a blank cheque, the signature is there, what it is being sent-for already filled-out, only the time remains to be penned-in.

For Fernando words are voices in your head:

> Clearly I hear things.
> As if you could ever know if the words that come to you that you
> think come to you are not merely voices in your head.

Spicer famously lamented that no one listened to poetry. Pop music had invaded the airwaves in the 1950s and Spicer kept pop music out of his serial poems. Fernando accepts the lyrics of Kansas, Fleetwood Mac, Prince, Matt Berninger, Skeeter Davis, Pink Floyd and the Bee Gees into his poetry. Nor does Fernando exclude Romanticism from his poems. He likes to interlard his poems with Romantic lamentations beginning with 'how' or 'ah':

> "Ah, perhaps voices in one's head are the very ones that sing … if only for you."
> "Ah writing, isolating with liberating doses of oblivion, […]"
> "The sunset of my grief tinged the whole sky. How I wished it did!"

Or expressions of regret with an implicit 'alas!':

> "If I could write a line onto life it would be you, a tune attuned to you."
> "[…] if only you knew how to tune yourself attune your antennae to it."

They express almost a desperation to contact the reader, whom he addresses at the beginning of the poem as "my dear."

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